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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1949

No. 181

THE UPTOWN CLUB OF MANHATTAN, INCORPORATED,
Petitioner,

vs.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE COURT OF CLAIMS

JOSEPH R. SHAUGHNESSY,
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PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF CLAIMS

The Uptown Club of Manhattan, Incorporated, prays that a writ of certiorari issue to review the judgment of the Court of Claims entered in the above-entitled cause on May 2, 1949.

Opinion Below

The opinion of the Court of Claims (R. 18-23) is reported in — F. Supp. —.

Jurisdiction

The judgment of the Court of Claims was entered on May 2, 1949 (R. 23). The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked under 28 U. S. C. section 1255 (1).

Question Presented

Is the petitioner, The Uptown Club of Manhattan, Incorporated, a social club or organization within the meaning

of Section 1710 of the Internal Revenue Code, as amended, and are the dues and initiation fees paid by its members subject to tax.

Statute and Regulations Involved

The applicable provisions of the statute and Regulations are set forth in the Appendix, infra, pp. 13-15.

Statement

The special findings of fact of the Court of Claims (R. 8-18) may be summarized as follows:

Petitioner was organized in 1918. It paid taxes on initiation fees and dues under Section 501 of the Revenue Acts of 1924 and 1926 (a provision similar to Section 1710 of the Internal Revenue Code which taxes dues of social, athletic, or sporting clubs). In 1928 petitioner claimed it was not a social, athletic, or sporting club and the Commissioner of Internal Revenue allowed the claim in January, 1929 and refunded the taxes paid (R. 8), and from that time until January, 1943, the Commissioner did not require plaintiff to pay such taxes (R. 8).

In February, 1943, the Commissioner reversed his position on the authority of *Duquesne Club* v. *Bell*, 127 F. (2nd) 363, and directed petitioner to collect and pay taxes on dues and initiation fees in the future (R. 9).

Accordingly, petitioner did so and, for the period from February, 1943 to September, 1946, paid taxes of $43,799.21 (R. 9).

In December, 1946, petitioner claimed a refund on the same ground, i.e., it was not a social club within the meaning of said Section 1710. Petitioner filed the required powers of attorney by its several members. The claim is for $38,573.89 (R. 10).

No action was taken by the Commissioner and a hearing in this proceeding was held in April, 1948 (R. 10).

The Court of Claims found that there was no material change in the purpose or character of petitioner's activities from 1924 to 1946, inclusive (R. 10).

Petitioner had its beginning by the action of the Fifth Avenue Association, an organization of merchants along Fifth Avenue. Its purpose was to provide a place where the members could have lunch together and discuss matters of common interest (R. 10).

Petitioner rents space in the Lincoln Building at 60 East 42nd Street in New York City. When the building was being constructed, the owners felt it was desirable to have a luncheon club in the building as an inducement to tenants (R. 10-11). The rentals paid by petitioner have always been substantially below the rentals of comparable space and have been largely measured by the petitioner's ability to pay (R. 11).

Petitioner is managed by 24 governors who elect the president, vice-presidents, secretary and treasurer (R. 11).

Any male person of 21 years of age or over may be a member. The number of members is determined from time to time by the governors (R. 11).

The initiation fee was waived for several years, but reinstated in 1945 in the amount of $100 for a resident member and $50 for a non-resident member (R. 12).

Petitioner's quarters are located in the heart of the Grand Central zone in New York City, convenient to railroad, airlines and subway lines (R. 12).

Petitioner maintains connected dining rooms with a total seating capacity for 363 persons. It has the necessary kitchen facilities and equipment to operate the dining room. All these are on the 26th floor of the building (R. 13).

In addition, on the 27th floor, petitioner has seven private dining rooms, a lounge, reception hall, lobby, bar, ladies'

dining room and the incidental facilities (R. 13). In the lobby, there are two cigar stands, a news ticker and a stock quotation ticker. In the lounge, besides the chairs, petitioner furnishes five current magazines, two weekly newspapers, three morning and two evening newspapers (R. 13).

Petitioner operates only from Monday through Friday. Prior to January, 1946, it was also open on Saturday. The Club is open from 7:00 a. m. until 6:30 p. m. (R. 14). It has never been open in the evenings, nor on Sundays or legal holidays.

The employees, except the bar and office employees, leave at 3 p. m. The office help leaves at 5 p. m. One bar man leaves at 3:30 p. m. and the other leaves at 6 p. m. One office man locks up at 6:30 p. m. (R. 14).

An average of five breakfasts only are served (R. 14).

No meals other than breakfast and luncheon are served. No meals are ever served on Sundays, holidays, or during evenings (R. 14).

The principal activity is during the luncheon period from 12 m. to about 2:30 p. m. About 400 luncheons are served. The average check is $2.15 (R. 14). The waiters are employed at the Club only three hours a day (R. 16).

The reception hall, lobby, and lounge are used by the members and their guests as a waiting place (R. 15).

Wives and female members of a member's family over 18 years of age may use the Club's ladies dining room facilities. They are not permitted beyond that area, except when ladies attend luncheon meetings of organizations using private dining rooms (R. 15). About 25 luncheons are served daily in the ladies dining room (R. 15).

There have never been any games or game playing on the Club premises. There are no radio reception facilities, no musical instruments, no billiards or other recreational facilities, no game rooms, no card rooms, no barber shop and no gymnasium. The Club has no dances, lectures, con-

certs or open-house. There are no sleeping quarters at the Club (Finding No. 20—R. 16).

In 1946 the Club had 500 resident members, 100 non-resident members and four junior members (R. 16-17). 199 members had their offices in the Lincoln Building (R. 17). All but 16 had their business addresses in the Grand Central zone. The said 16 members were those who formerly were in business in the Grand Central zone and whose offices moved to another New York area (R. 17).

Many of the large business organizations have several officers and employees who are members, from one or two up to as high as 47 (R. 17). Some business organizations pay the dues of such officers and employees (R. 17).

It is the general experience of the Club that members resign when their business connections leave the Grand Central area (R. 17).

The Club serves as a convenient and comfortable place for its members to secure luncheon, and as a place where members may discuss matters of a business nature during the luncheon period (R. 18).

Some corporations and business groups have regularly reserved tables where executives, department heads and similar officials and employees of a given business organization have luncheon together and discuss business problems related to that organization (R. 18).

Other business groups have regular luncheon meetings, for example, monthly, where matters of a business nature are considered, such as directors' meetings (R. 18).

On the foregoing findings of fact, the Court of Claims, two judges dissenting, held that the Club had no predominant business purpose; that its social features were not incidental, but were a material part of its activities and that it was a social club and therefore dismissed the petition (R. 23).

Reasons for Granting the Writ

1. There is a conflict with respect to the taxability of dues and initiation fees paid to luncheon clubs between the decisions of the Court of Claims and of the Circuit Courts of Appeals for the First and Third Circuits; and there is a conflict between the decisions of the Court of Claims itself.

2. This question has never heretofore been presented to this Supreme Court.

3. The Bureau of Internal Revenue needs a decision from this highest Court to reconcile the inconsistencies and conflicts found in the cases, in order to have an effective orderly and consistent administration of the statute.

The Attorney General in his brief in the Court of Claims in the present case pointed out that there are now seven other similar cases and probably many more suits will be filed. He showed that it is of vital importance that a final determination be made as to the line of demarcation which properly should separate taxable clubs from those which are non-taxable, so that the taxing authorities may be able to determine whether a given club is within or is without the statute, and thus eliminate the necessity of resort to the courts in each case.

In support of the statement that there is a conflict between the decisions of the Court of Claims and of the Circuit Courts of Appeals, we call attention to the following cases:

Aldine Club v. *United States,* 65 C. Cls. 315. In this case the Court of Claims found the following facts (p. 316):

> "The purposes and only function of the Aldine Club during the years in question has been to furnish to its members a luncheon between the hours of 12:00 and 3:00 P. M. on business days only. The Aldine Club occupies as its quarters rooms on the fourteenth floor of an office building, No. 200 Fifth Avenue, New York City. Situate in the Club are: main dining room,

ladies' dining room, two small lunch rooms, kitchen, coat room, ladies' wash room, gentlemen's wash room, reading room and directors' room. The main dining room seats about three hundred and fifty people, the ladies' dining room from fifty to seventy-five people (P. 317). The membership of the Club is not confined to any class but is constituted for the most part of merchants whose business is located in the vicinity of the Club. As soon as their business locations move the members usually resign. The present membership of the club is, resident, 511, non-resident 81."

On these findings the Court held (p. 319):

"It appears that not its (that is the Club's) name and inferentially not its charter declarations but its purposes and activities determine its character for taxation purposes. And though there may be social features incident to its general activities yet if its social feature is a subordinate and merely an incidental feature to the predominant purpose of the organization it is not a social club."

Further, the Court said:

"This must be true unless all clubs where people congregate are social clubs."

And the Club was held not taxable.

In *Block Hall Inc.* v. *United States,* 57 Fed. (2nd) 918 the Court of Claims also wrote:

"Clubs intended to promote and foster the development and expansion of the various serious activities of the community or those given to the single purpose of serving food to its membership, notwithstanding they may have in a measure a dual activity, one incidentally social and the other non-social, were not as held by the Courts within the purview of the Revenue Law."

Next in point of time is the case of *Duquesne Club* v. *Bell*, 127 Fed. (2nd) 363, decided by the Circuit Court of Appeals of the Third Circuit. That Court held, rightly we think, that on the basis of that Club's facilities and activities it was a social club, within the meaning of Section 1710 of the Internal Revenue Code. But that Court went further and wrote:

> "We are prepared to say that an organization whether incorporated or not which provides an opportunity for its members to meet each other at mealtimes and partake together of food and drink with conversation on whatever subject pleases them is a social organization."

And the Court held that the dues and initiation fees of that Club were subject to tax.

Next the Court of Claims in the case of *The Merchants Club* v. *United States*, 66 Fed. Supp. 126, decided in 1946, commented upon the Duquesne Club decision and said:

> "The Court uses language to the effect that any club where food and drink are served, with conversation on whatever subject pleases the membership, is a social organization within the meaning of the statute. But the language was manifestly *dictum* since the social features of that Club were so numerous as to make it clearly taxable."

Again the Circuit Court of Appeals for the First Circuit in the case of *Turks Head Club* v. *Broderick*, 166 Fed. 2nd 877, wrote:

> "There is a line of decisions in the Court of Claims taking the view that the furnishing of meals to club members is in itself a non-social activity, and if this is the predominant purpose of the club, other features of a social character being merely subordinate or incidental to the active furtherance of such predominant

> purpose, then that club is not a social club." (Citing Merchants Club *v.* United States, 66 Fed. Supp. 126, and earlier cases cited therein.)

and held the Club to be subject to this tax on dues.

The cases above recited clearly show the conflict that exists between the Court of Claims and the Circuit Courts of Appeals.

Again, the decision of the Court of Claims in the instant case of the Uptown Club of Manhattan is in conflict with the earlier decisions of the Court of Claims in the three cases above cited. Seemingly the Court of Claims adhered to the test of its earlier decisions, but in fact has reversed itself and thus created a chaotic condition.

The Court's findings in this instant case are practically identical with the findings of the Court in both the *Aldine Club* case and the *Merchants Club* case, *supra*, and yet its decision, by a vote of three to two, is contrary.

The Court of Claims made no reference in its opinion in the instant case to the decision in the *Aldine Club* case, although that case was stressed prominently in the petitioner's brief. The similarity, if not the identity, of the purposes and functions of the Aldine Club and the Merchants Club and the petitioner, the Uptown Club of Manhattan, are made manifest by the following comparisons from the records of the three cases.

The purposes and functions of the Aldine Club were found by the Court as stated above to be only to furnish to its members a luncheon during the midday on business days only. The quarters occupied by the Aldine Club as particularly specified above are almost identical with those of the Uptown Club. The membership of the Aldine Club was not confined to any class but was composed for the most part of merchants whose business is located in the vicinity of the club and as soon as their business location

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moved the members usually resign (65 C. Cls, at page 317 as quoted above).

Just as in the Aldine Club so in the Uptown Club the vast majority of the 500 resident members of the Uptown Club, in fact all except 16 have their business addresses in the Grand Central zone, 199 in the Lincoln Building itself, and the general experience of the Club is that members resign when their business connections leave this area (R. 17).

All three Clubs are open only during business hours on working days (R. 14).

"The Merchants Club is lacking in many social features found in many luncheon clubs" (R. 21). This is also true of the Uptown Club (R. 16).

"It is a luncheon club primarily for cotton textile merchants" (R. 21). So too, the Uptown Club is a luncheon club primarily for business and professional men in the Grand Central zone (R. 10, 16-17).

All three clubs serve as convenient places to secure luncheons and as semi-official headquarters for their members and for a place where members may discuss matters of a business nature during the luncheon period (R. 18 and 21).

All three clubs are closed on all holidays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Many official meetings and conferences are held at the Merchants Club (R. 21).

"At the Uptown Club some corporations and business groups have regularly reserved tables at the Club daily where executives, department heads and similar officials and employees of a given business organization have luncheon together and discuss problems connected with or related to that business organization. Other business groups have regularly scheduled luncheon meetings at other

times, for example monthly, where matters of a business nature are considered, such as directors' meetings. The private dining rooms are much in demand for meetings by business groups and are often reserved weeks in advance" (R. 18).

Thus, the Merchants Club decision and the Aldine Club decision are both good authority for the petitioner's contention in this case. On the findings in the *Uptown Club* case, the Court of Claims should have again ruled as it did in the *Merchants Club* case and should have said as it there said:

> "The predominant purposes of the Club are to furnish to its members convenient luncheon facilities on business days as well as a place where they can hold business meetings and conferences, the social features being incidental to these purposes."

Instead of so doing the Court of Claims, strangely we submit, wrote in its opinion:

> "We find the Uptown Club had no predominant business purpose" (R. 23).

This cannot be justified by the Court's own findings of fact unless the Court has determined to reverse its former decisions.

It is therefore respectfully submitted by this petitioner that the decision in the instant case taken in connection with the former decisions of this Court and of the Circuit Court of Appeals creates a chaotic condition of law. Seemingly the Court of Claims adheres to the test of its earlier decisions, but in fact reverses itself. Its findings in this case are identical with the findings in both the earlier *Aldine Club* case and *Merchants Club* case and yet its decision by a divided Court, three to two, is contrary.

Conclusion

It is therefore respectfully submitted that this petition for a writ of certiorari should be granted.

Dated: June 29th, 1949.

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ALLIN, RIGGS & SHAUGHNESSY,
Attorneys for Petitioner.

APPENDIX

Internal Revenue Code:

Sec. 1710. Tax.

(a) (As amended by Section 543 (a) of the Revenue Act of 1941, c. 412, 55 Stat. 687) Rate—There shall be levied, assessed, collected, and paid—

(1) Dues or Membership Fees.—A tax equivalent to 11 per centum of any amount paid as dues or membership fees to any social, athletic, or sporting club or organization, if the dues or fees of an active resident annual member are in excess of $10 per year.

(2) Initiation Fees.—A tax equivalent to 11 per centum of any amount paid as initiation fees to such a club or organization, if such fees amount to more than $10, or if the dues or membership fees, not including initiation fees, of an active resident annual member are in excess of $10 per year.

* * * * * * *

(b) By Whom Paid.—The taxes imposed by subdivision (a) shall be paid by the person paying such dues or fees, or holding such life membership. (26 U. S. C. 1946 ed., Sec. 1710).

Section 1650 of the Internal Revenue Code, added by Section 210 of the Revenue Act of 1940, c. 419, 54 Stat. 516, was amended by Section 302 (a) of the Revenue Act of 1943, c. 63, 58 Stat. 21, to increase the rate of tax to 20 per cent effective April 1, 1944.

Sec. 1712. Definitions.

As used in this subchapter—

(a) (As amended by Section 543 (a) of the Revenue Act of 1941, *supra*) Dues.—The term "dues" includes any assessment, irrespective of the purpose for which made, and any charges for social privileges or facilities, or for golf, tennis, polo, swimming, or other athletic or

sporting privileges or facilities, for any period of more than six days; and

* * * * * * *

(26 U. S. C. 1946 ed., Sec. 1712.)

Treasury Regulations 43 (1941 ed.), promulgated under the Internal Revenue Code:

Sec. 101.24 Determination of Character of Club.—The purposes and activities of a club or organization *and not its name* determine its character for the purpose of the tax. Every club or organization having social, athletic or sporting features is presumed to be included within the meaning of the phrase, "any social, athletic, or sporting club or organization", until the contrary has been proved, and the burden of proof is upon it. Every such club or organization, therefore, unless it falls within the express exemption of the Code (see section 101.30), must collect, return, and pay over the tax imposed by the Code, unless and until it has satisfied the Commissioner of Internal Revenue that it is not in fact "social, athletic, or sporting" within the meaning of the Code and as defined in these regulations. If any such club or organization claims that it is not in fact "social, athletic, or sporting," it shall submit to the collector a copy of its charter or constitution and by-laws, together with a statement showing its actual purposes, activities, practices, and facilities, the character of its expenditures, and such other evidence as may be requested. Upon consideration of the evidence submitted, the collector will determine, if he can do so, whether or not such club or organization comes within the provisions of the Code. If, however, the collector is in doubt as to whether or not the club or organization is "social, athletic, or sporting," he will refer the statement and accompanying papers to the Commissioner for decision. When a club or organization has been held not to be a "social, athletic, or sporting" club or organization it need not thereafter make a return or any further showing with respect to its status under the law, unless it changes the character of its organization

or operations or the purpose for which it was originally created. Collectors will keep a list of all clubs and organizations held not to be "social, athletic, or sporting" clubs or organizations, to the end that they may occasionally inquire into their status and ascertain whether the conditions upon which their exemption was predicated remain unchanged. If the collector decides that the club or organization comes within the provisions of the Code and the club or organization is not satisfied with his decision, it may request that the matter be referred to the Commissioner for a ruling.

Sec. 101.25 Social Clubs.—Any organization which maintains quarters or arranges periodical dinners or meetings, for the purpose of affording its members an opportunity of congregating for social intercourse, is a "social * * * club or organization" within the meaning of the Code, unless its social features are not a material purpose of the organization but are subordinate and merely incidental to the active furtherance of a different and predominant purpose, such as, for example, religion, the arts, or business. The tax does not attach to dues or fees of a religious organization, chamber of commerce, commercial club, trade organization, or the like, merely because it has incidental social features, but if the social features are a material purpose of the organization, it is a "social * * * club or organization" within the meaning of the Code. An organization that has for its exclusive or predominant purpose religion or philanthropic social service (or the advancement of the business or commercial interests of a city or community) is clearly not a "social * * * club or organization". Most fraternal organizations are in effect social clubs, but if they are operating under the lodge system, or are local fraternal organizations among the students of a college or university, payments to them are expressly exempt (See section 101.30).

* * * * * * *